

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* behaviour

At an isolated spring below Emarti Hill in Masai Mara Game Reserve, Kenya on 19 October 1993, I watched the following behaviour by a pair of Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus*.

One of the birds (which later proved to be the female) sat on the ground, eyes partly closed, as if resting. The male (cere orange rather than yellow) repeatedly picked up grey hair-like material which I later identified as regurgitated indigestible material from a small predator, possibly a jackal. The male carried this material in his beak and presented it to the female, touching her beak with the offering. After three attempts in which the female took no apparent notice, the male placed the material on the ground in front of her. She immediately picked it up, held it, and crouched down; then the male mounted her and copulation took place.

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Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbirds *Anthreptes neglectus* at Tana, Kenya

The Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbird *Anthreptes neglectus* is one of Kenya's least recorded birds with only about six published sight or specimen records. Its known range extends from coastal northern Mozambique through eastern Tanzania to the coastal lowlands of Kenya (Britton 1980, Collar & Stuart 1985). In Kenya, however, it is only known from four sites: Makere West Forest on the lower Tana River, Shimba Hills, Buda Forest, and Jadini Forest (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989, Waiyaki & Bennun 1994).

During about 24 days in February, March and June 1994 I visited nearly all of the 55 or so riverine forest patches along the lower Tana River as part of an extensive survey of the region's endangered primates. Throughout the survey I searched for the rarer birds reported along this stretch of the river, particularly *A. neglectus* and the White-winged Apalis *Apalis chariessa*. The only previous record of *A. neglectus* in Tana River forests is of a female collected in Makere West Forest 32 years ago (Keith 1968).

On 19 February I had a brief but good (4 m distance) view of a female *A. neglectus* near the centre of Kitere Forest (165 m a.s.l.) in the Tana River Primate National Reserve. This is apparently only the second sighting of this sunbird north of Mombasa (i.e., Jadini Forest), and the first for this reserve. Kitere Forest is located about 10 km to the south of Makere West Forest. Both forests are on the west bank of the Tana.

I returned to Kitere Forest on 8 June and spent 3 h following a slow-moving, unusually large, bird party of at least 18 species:

Trumpeter Hornbill *Bycanistes bucinator*, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus bilineatus*, Golden-tailed Woodpecker *Campethera abingoni*, Little Spotted Woodpecker *C. cailliautii*, Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*, Zanzibar Sombre Greenbul *Andropadus importunus*, Red-capped Robin Chat *Cossypha natalensis*, Red-tailed Ant Thrush *Neocossyphus rufus*, Black-

headed *Apalis Apalis melanocephala*, Black-throated Wattle-eye *Platysteira peltata*, Little Yellow Flycatcher *Erythrocerus holochlorus*, Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis*, Crested Flycatcher *Trochocercus cyanomelas*, Collared Sunbird *Anthreptes collaris*, Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbird *A. neglectus*, Dark-backed Weaver *Ploceus bicolor*.

In addition, there was one unidentified greenbul and one unidentified warbler. A male and female *A. neglectus* were present in the bird party.

Both *A. neglectus* were seen clearly in good light from 8–15 m on several occasions. They met the species' descriptions given by Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1960) and Williams & Arlott (1980) with the exception that I could not detect any green edging to the primaries and the female had but a trace of yellow on the abdomen (i.e., not bright yellow). The field character which most clearly differentiated both the male and female from the closely related eastern Violet-backed Sunbird *A. orientalis* was the greyish-brown underparts. *A. orientalis* has nearly pure white underparts. In addition, unlike the female *A. orientalis*, the female *A. neglectus* lacked the white streak above the eye.

Keith (1986) also remarked that the female *A. neglectus* he collected in Makere West Forest had reduced yellow below and less green on the wings. There may be some slight, but significant, phenotypic differences between the Tana birds and those from south of Mombasa. The subspecific status of the Tana birds needs investigation.

Throughout the 8 June encounter, the pair of *A. neglectus* were usually within a few metres of one another as they actively foraged for insects among the dense foliage of the outer branches of trees. They were generally 5–10 m above the ground but sometimes dropped to within 1 m. On one occasion the male and female sat side by side on a twig for about 5 min during which the female briefly preened the male.

Mackworth-Praed and Grant (1960) describe the call of *A. neglectus* as "a loud persistent squeak". This was not heard during the Tana encounters. Instead, what was heard often was the typical sunbird sharp *tsssp* given 1–4 times in succession. This call was sometimes followed immediately by a melodious 1-s long warbling trill. Thus, the call is quite different from those of the two more common sunbirds in the lower Tana forests, the Collared *A. collaris* and the Olive Sunbird *Nectarinia olivacea*. As such, the call should be a useful aid in locating the rather inconspicuous *A. neglectus*.

During the 3 h I was with the bird party, it moved about 120 m through evergreen forest where most trees were 10–30 m in height. As the party approached the extensive stand of phoenix palms *Phoenix reclinata* on the edge of the forest, the birds reversed direction and started to move back towards the centre of the forest. The more common tree species here were *Alangium salvifolium*, *Cordia ghoeztii*, *Ficus sycomorus*, *Oxystigma msou*, *Pachystela msolo* and *Sorindeia obtusifoliolata*. The lower vegetation was moderately dense and dominated by *Polysphaeria multiflora* and *P. reclinata*. Horizontal visibility at 2 m above ground was 3–15 m.

At Tana, as in other regions where *A. neglectus* and *A. orientalis* live in close proximity, *A. neglectus* is apparently a true forest bird whereas *A. orientalis* does not enter forest, being a species of more arid vegetation types such as bush and open woodland (Williams & Arlott 1980, Britton 1980, Lewis & Pomeroy 1989). There seems to be little habitat overlap between the two species.

Although Kitere Forest is approximately 18-ha in size, only about 4–5 ha is tall

evergreen forest and probably suitable habitat for *A. neglectus*. While this forest is protected within the reserve, there remains a moderate level of cutting of palm fronds, poles, firewood and canoe paddles by the local Pokomo. The presence here of two groups of Tana River Red Colobus *Colobus badius rufomitratu*s and one group of Tana River Crested Mangabeys *Cercocebus g. galeritu*s, both highly endangered, endemic primate subspecies, should help to ensure that this forest gets the protection and management it needs to survive into the foreseeable future.

Unfortunately, Makere West Forest, where Keith (1968) obtained the first and only other record for *A. neglectus* at Tana, is among the most damaged forests in the area. Makere West Forest is still about 48-ha in size but only a few hectares hold good high forest, the remainder being secondary forest and dense bush. Lying just north of the reserve, it is heavily exploited for poles and firewood, and a large portion of the original forested area has been cleared for agriculture. I made two brief visits to Makere West Forest but saw no *A. neglectus*. More work needs to be done to determine whether *A. neglectus* is still present in this forest.

While *A. neglectus* is certainly one of the rarer birds in the forests of the lower Tana River, it is also one that is easily overlooked. While forest loss in the region has been considerable during the last several decades, there remain more than 50 small (1–100 ha) to medium sized (100–1000 ha) evergreen forests. Much more research is needed to determine the status of *A. neglectus*, *Apalis charrissa* and other rare birds in these forests.

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